

Prehistoric pottery from Shopwyke and Merston, West Sussex

Feature dating and research potential

by
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Technical report 3

*A significant find of Kent Middle Bronze Age pottery: the Deverel-Rimbury
assemblage from East Hall Farm, Sittingbourne*
by Mike Seager Thomas & Sue Hamilton
(text commissioned by Museum of London Archaeology Services)

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1 Summary

The prehistoric assemblage from Shopwyke comprises 140 sherds weighing c 2.5 kgs. Of the deposits at Shopwyke containing prehistoric pottery, five have Middle Iron Age (MIA) *termini post quem* (contexts 85, 204, 218, 717 and 918), ten Late Iron Age (LIA) *termini post quem* (contexts 8, 75, 143, 172, 211, 230, 243, 710, 719 and 737) and eleven either LIA/Roman (contexts 232, 903 and 908) or Roman (contexts 192, 207, 220, 227, 229, 730, 806 and 909) *termini post quem*. The remainder are most probably Iron Age (IA) but owing to difficulties distinguishing MIA, LIA and Roman flint tempered fabrics on site their dating remains provisional. A single body sherd from context 738 may be of LBA date. The assemblage from Merston (context 209) comprises 6 sherds and weighs 28 gms. It is of LBA date.

2 Typological Context

2.1 Late Bronze Age

It is not possible to place the LBA assemblage from Merston precisely since it contains no feature sherds. Close fabric parallels, however, occur in LBA assemblages from Bosham (Gardiner and Hamilton 1997), Littlehampton (fabrics not published) (Gilkes 1991), Selsey (Seager Thomas 1998) and various other West Sussex sites. No other LBA material is known from the Shopwyke/Merston area.

2.2 Middle Iron Age

The MIA material belongs to the saucepan pot tradition. Close parallels occur in assemblages from the West Sussex settlement sites at Chilgrove (Cunliffe 1979), North Bersted (Morris 1978) and Littlehampton (Gilkes 1993), and the hillfort assemblages from Torberry (Cunliffe 1976) and The Trundle (Curwen 1929). Two Oving sites, Copse Farm (Hamilton 1985) and Dairy Lane (Browse and Kenny 1991), which yielded saucepan pottery and straddled the present excavations are likely to belong to the same site complex. Sussex saucepan pottery is thought to date from as early as the fourth century BC (Hamilton 1993). The frequent succession – and possibly association – of Sussex saucepan and later Iron Age pottery, and the carrying over of saucepan pottery fabrics and decorative motifs into this later tradition, suggest that the relationships between the two require further resolution. Of particular interest is the probable extended longevity of Sussex saucepan pottery usage.

2.3 Late Iron Age

The Shopwyke LIA material includes both Southern Atrebatic and Aylesford-Swarling types. Broad parallels occur in assemblages from adjacent settlement sites at Copse Farm, Oving (Hamilton 1985), and Portfield quarry (Curwen and Frere 1947), and at North Bersted (Morris 1978), Torberry hillfort (Cunliffe 1976), and the cemetery site at Westhampnett (Mephram 1997). Dating is complicated by a slight overlap with Sussex early Roman assemblages (e.g. Ounces Barn, Boxgrove: Bedwin and Orton 1984; Bedwin and Place 1995). Generally, however, Southern Atrebatic and Aylesford-Swarling types span the end of the first millennium BC (Hamilton 1985). A date immediately prior to the close of the millennium is suggested for the majority of the present assemblage, owing to 1) similarities between it and the assemblage from Copse Farm which is

associated with Dressel 1 amphorae, 2) a lack of imported finewares usually associated with immediately pre-Roman assemblages, and 3) the sparsitiy of indisputably wheel-thrown vessels, associated at several Sussex sites with imported finewares (e.g. Littlehampton: Gilkes 1993; Hamilton 1985, 1993). A few sherds in atypical fabrics, possibly representing imports, or associated with Roman material are probably later.

3. Fabric dating

Although similar fabric groups to those identified at Shopwyke occur within the region during the LBA most are associated with diagnostically IA feature sherds. For this reason it is probably unnecessary to look outside this period for dating. A body sherd in fabric IF from Shopwyke's context 738, however, has a 'fingered' appearance consistent with a LBA date (cf Gardiner and Hamilton 1997). Since neither Shopwyke nor the surrounding area have yielded indisputable LBA pottery it has been provisionally assigned to the Iron Age. The doubt raised by it, however, hangs over all typologically undiagnostic pottery from the site. Some body sherds from Merston are coarser (fabric CF) but still within the wide range characteristic of LBA fabrics locally. Given their spatial separation from the area of IA activity centered on Shopwyke, a LBA date is thought very likely.

Additionally, it is difficult to distinguish MIA and LIA flint tempered fabrics within the Shopwyke assemblage. Typologically undiagnostic flint tempered sherds are therefore placed in a broad IA group. More detailed examination of the fabrics, particularly if it incorporates the MIA assemblage from Dairy Lane, should resolve this problem. A similar difficulty applies to material from the end of the LIA. Given the presence Early Roman activity on site (Featherby 2001), it is possible that occupation continued through the transitional period without interruption. Sussex fabrics belonging to this transitional period, particularly if flint tempered, can be difficult to distinguish from those of

the LIA (Bedwin and Orton 1984). These raise very similar problems to the possible LBA sherd discussed above.

Table

Fabric	Description	Provisional date range
CF	Coarse calcined flint	LBA
FF	Fine calcined flint	IA
FS	Calcined flint and shell	LIA
G	Grog	LIA/Early Roman
GF	Grog and flint grit	LIA
IF	Intermediate calcined flint	(?)LBA- LIA/Early Roman
Q	Quartz sand	LIA-LIA/Early Roman
QFS	Quartz sand, calcined flint and shell	LIA/Early Roman
QS	Quartz sand and shell	LIA

4. Spot dating

4.1. Middle Iron Age

The Shopwyke assemblage comprises features sherds from between seven and ten MIA saucepan pots. These were recovered from eleven deposits. Feature sherds from contexts 204, 227 and 229 and non-feature sherds from contexts 207 and 220 are thought to be from a single vessel. Those from contexts 207, 227, 229, 806, 903 and 908 are associated with later types and cannot be used for context dating. Context 918 yielded a single abraded feature sherd along with several undiagnostic body sherds, context 85 yielded nine small sherds from a single vessel, and contexts 204, 218 and 717 yielded individual sherds only. Although some of the foregoing are unabraded, all should be used with caution in terms of context dating, since so few sherds are represented. Clearly, however, they indicate a significant use of saucepan pottery in the vicinity.

4.2 Late Iron Age

Only two deposits can be dated to the LIA with confidence: contexts 75 and 243. Both contained large, unabraded sherds of LIA date, the former mostly of Southern Atrebatian type, the latter of Aylesford-Swarling type. Context 243 also incorporated a weathered sherd of Aylesford-Swarling type. Single abraded Roman and post-Roman sherds from context 75 can be dismissed as intrusive. Seven further deposits (contexts 8, 143, 211, 230, 710 and 737) are assigned LIA *termini post quem* on the basis of the latest pottery occurring in them, and one (context 172) because it overlies a LIA deposit (context 143). Aylesford-Swarling pottery also occurred in contexts 192 and 227, both Roman features. LIA feature sherds from contexts 143 and 192 are weathered on one side only and are likely to have lain exposed for some time before incorporation in the deposits from which they were recovered. This is consistent with the later dating of 192. Context 195 yielded a single body sherd decorated using motifs which straddle both the MIA and LIA: it could belong to either.

3.4. Late Iron Age/Roman

Three deposits are likely to belong to the very end of the LIA or the beginning of the Roman period (contexts 232, 903 and 908). For LIA Shopwyke, all incorporate problematic fabrics. Context 232, firstly, contains at least three fabrics absent from LIA contexts. Secondly, a sandwich fired quartz tempered ware from 903, although similar to some local LIA fabrics (Hamilton 1993), resembles that of a lattice decorated sherd from a Roman deposit (context 229) (*see below*) which cannot be paralleled in LIA contexts locally. Finally, context 908 contains flint and grog tempered vessels best paralleled locally in the assemblage from Ounces Barn, Boxgrove (Bedwin and Orton 1984, Bedwin and Plaice 1995). It also yielded a perforated base – a type present in the LIA assemblage from Copse Farm, Oving, and at Ounces Barn – which conjoins with a sherd from 909 which has a Roman *terminus post quem*. Contexts 220, 227 and 229, which contain MIA, LIA and LIA/Roman

pottery, have Roman *termini post quem* because of the association of fragments of a saucepan pot, fragments of which occur in all of them, with Roman material in context 207.

4. Catalogue

SHOPWYKE (full excavation)

Context			Pot no.	Description	Local parallels	Likely vessel date	TPQ
Fill	Cut	Same as(?)					
8		7, 911		2 sherds (FF, FS)			LIA
75	72			27 sherds (FF, GF, IF, Q)			LIA (single Roman and post-Roman sherds)
			1	Shoulder with burnished hatching, short upright neck, and rounded to beaded rim of large, high-shouldered jar. BIF	Bersted; Selsey (decoration parallels at Westhampnett)	LIA	
			2	Shoulder with raised cordon and slightly concave neck of necked bowl or jar. BFF	Copse Farm, Bersted, Ounces Barn, Westhampnett	LIA	
			3	Rounded shoulder with short upright neck and rounded to beaded rim of high shouldered bowl. BGF	Bersted; Westhampnett	LIA	
			4	Rounded rim and concave neck. BFS		LIA	
85	83			8 small sherds (IF)			MIA
			5	Rounded rim of saucepan pot. Two horizontal furrows below rim. BIF	Chilgrove; The Trundle; Torberry	MIA	
142	112	736		2 weathered sherds (IF)			IA
143	141			12 weathered sherds (FF, IF, Q)			LIA
			6	Concave body sherd with horizontal groove. BFF		?LIA	
			7	Straight body sherd with narrow, horizontal furrowing. Weathered internally. BQ	(decoration parallels at Westhampnett)	LIA	
155	134			2 weathered sherds (FF)			IA
163	124			1 sherd (IF)			IA
172	112	736		3 sherds (FF, IF)			LIA
173	113			4 weathered sherds (IF)			IA
			8	Short upright or slightly everted neck with rounded to beaded rim. IF		IA	
181	182			1 weathered sherd (IF)			IA
192	45	904	9	Rounded shoulder with raised, horizontal cordon and marginal furrows. Weathered internally. BQ	Copse Farm, Bersted, Westhampnett	LIA	Roman
195	194		10	Slightly convex body sherd with burnished, straight horizontal and zigzag lines. BIF		MIA or LIA	IA

200	7	8, 911		1 sherd (IF)			IA
204	36			Flat base. BIF. Identical fabric to 14/15		MIA	MIA
207	24			5 sherds, 1 fabric type (IF)			Roman
211	53		11	Flared neck with rounded rim and rounded shoulder of high shouldered bowl. Tool marks at sharp angle of shoulder and rim. BQ	Torberry	LIA	LIA
218	17		12	Flat base of saucepan pot with furrow around edge of base and 2 horizontal furrows on wall immediately above base. BIF	Torberry	MIA	MIA
220	30			3 sherds (IF, Q)			Roman
223	224			4 sherds (IF)			IA
227	26			4 sherds (FF, Q)			Roman
			13	Angular cavetto/neck, rounded rim and rounded, notched shoulder with horizontal groove of necked bowl. Possibly wheel thrown. BQ	Bersted; Westhampnett	LIA	
			14	Rounded and internally beveled rim of (?)barrel-shaped saucepan pot. BFF. Identical fabric to 15	Bersted; Torberry; Littlehampton; the Trundle	MIA	
229	20		15	Body sherd with curvilinear burnished decoration of probable saucepan pot. BFF. Identical fabric to 14	Torberry; Littlehampton; The Trundle	MIA	Roman
			16	Body sherd with raised cordon and fine, burnish/tooled lattice decoration. BQ		LIA/ Roman	
230	9			10 weathered sherds (GF, IF)			LIA
232				10 sherds (G, IF, S)			LIA/ Roman
			17	Body sherd with raised cordon or notched shoulder. BG		LIA/ Roman	
243	9			13 sherds (FS, GF, Q, QS)			LIA (single Roman sherd)
			18	Flat, splayed base. BQ	Copse Farm, Westhampnett	LIA	
			19	Rounded shoulder with 2 raised cordons with marginal furrows of high shouldered jar. Possibly wheel-thrown. BQ. Possibly the same vessel as 20	Copse Farm, Westhampnett	LIA	
			20	Upper shoulder with raised cordon, concave neck and rounded to beaded, everted and internally bevelled rim of necked bowl or jar. probably wheel-thrown. BQ. Possibly the same vessel as 19	Copse Farm, Bersted, Westhampnett, Ounces Barn.	LIA	
			21	Flat base of slightly convex-sided jar. QS	Copse Farm, Westhampnett	LIA	
			22	Rounded, (?)slightly everted rim. BGF		LIA	

SHOPWYKE (assessment)

706	707			23 sherds (FF, IF)			IA
			23	Body sherd with furrow similar to those on saucepan pots (above). IF		MIA/ LIA	

710	711			6 sherds (FF, IF)			LIA
			24	Upper shoulder with upright rounded to beaded rim of very large, high-shouldered jar. IF	Bersted, Torberry	LIA	
717	716		25	Rounded, internally bevelled rim of saucepan pot. Three horizontal furrows below rim. BIF	Bersted, Chilgrove, Torberry, The Trundle	MIA	MIA
719	718			3 sherds (IF, S)			LIA
			26	Rounded rim of (?)barrel shaped jar. BS			
720	722			5 sherds (CF, IF)			IA
725	724			1 sherd (IF)			IA
727	726			3 sherds (FF)			IA
730	734			1 sherd (S)			Roman
737	740			11 sherds (FF, IF)			LIA
			27	Slightly everted rim, squared externally, rounded internally. BFF		LIA	
738	740		28	Fingered sherd (IF)		LBA/IA	IA
806	807			3 sherds (IF)			Roman
			29	Rounded rim of saucepan pot. BIF. Two horizontal and one curved furrow below rim	Bersted, Torberry, Littlehampton, The Trundle	MIA	
903	904	45		12 sherds (IF, Q)			LIA/ Roman
905				1 sherd (FF)			IA
908	911			13 sherds (FF, GF, IF, QFS)			LIA/ Roman
			30	Slightly curving body sherd with horizontal, dot impressed line of (?)saucepan pot. BIF	Bersted, Copse Farm, Torberry, Westhampnett	MIA/ LIA	
			31	Body sherd with (?)curved, dot impressed line. BIF	Torberry	MIA/ LIA	
			32	Body sherd decorated with irregular, tooled mesh. BGF		LIA	
			33	Rounded rim, flared neck and rounded shoulder with horizontal furrow of (?)high shouldered jar. BGF	Ounces Barn, Westhampnett (without furrow)	LIA	
			34	Rounded rim, flared neck and round shoulder. BIF	Ounces Barn (Devil's Ditch)	LIA/ Roman	
			35	Flat base with central perforation. BQFS. Conjoins with 38	Copse Farm, Ounces Barn	LIA	
909	911			38 sherds (FF, GF, IF, QFS)			Roman
			36	Pedestal base. FF	Bersted, Ounces Barn, Torberry, Westhampnett	LIA	
			37	Rounded, very slightly everted rim. FF	Bersted, Westhampnett		
			38	Rounded to squared, slightly everted rim	Bersted, Westhampnett	LIA	
			39	Flat base. BQFS. Conjoins with 34		LIA	
918	6			7 sherds (IF)			MIA
			40	Rounded, internally bevelled rim of large saucepan pot. Two slightly wavy horizontal furrows below rim. IF	Torberry	MIA	

MERSTON

209	208			6 sherds (CF, IF)			LBA
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Key: B = burnished (numbered feature sherds only)

5. *Research Issues*

Owing to the sparsity of LIA finds from West Sussex, any new assemblage – particularly if it is stratified – is of importance. Three research issues relating to IA Shopwyke are of interest. Firstly, for the Sussex MIA/LIA there are both similarities within, and variations between, pottery assemblages from different types of contexts and different types of site. These are manifest in terms of form and manufacturing technique. It has been noted, for example, that Westhampnett lacks very large ‘storage’ vessels and that many of its Aylesford-Swarling types are hand-made (Mephram 1997). By contrast, the assemblage from Copse Farm, Oving, incorporates more of both (Hamilton 1985). Shopwyke appears to fall in the same category as Copse Farm, but this needs to be investigated in terms of specific feature/context relationships. It should be noted, for example, that the principal finds of Southern Atrebatian and Aylesford-Swarling pottery come from different parts of the site (north and centre, respectively). This may have implications in terms of date, feature/site function and/or pottery use. These themes also apply to the beginning, and to the end, of the LIA. Shopwyke’s ~~earlier~~ LIA contexts provide a point of comparison between the LIA proper and the LIA/Roman transition, for example, and there is a difference between Dairy Lane, Oving, which has yielded MIA pottery only and Shopwyke and Copse Farm which have yielded MIA and LIA pottery. Secondly, Shopwyke provides an opportunity to investigate the nature and meaning of artefact deposition in the Iron Age and Roman periods. Although it could be a function of sampling/recovery, the ratio of feature to non-feature sherds is unusually high, sherds from a single saucepan pot occur in a number of (Roman) contexts, and Southern Atrebatian wares appear to occur more frequently in pits than in ditches. It has also be noted that some sherds are weathered on one

side only. The first may have implications in terms of so-called 'structured' deposition and both aid our understanding of site organization: which features were in use at a particular time, how material was dispersed on site etc. Lastly, the finer resolution of specific fabrics and their identification with chronologically diagnostic forms may improve the chronological resolution of the assemblage and help us place the forgoing in a clearer chronological context.

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Shopwyke WX SHO 00

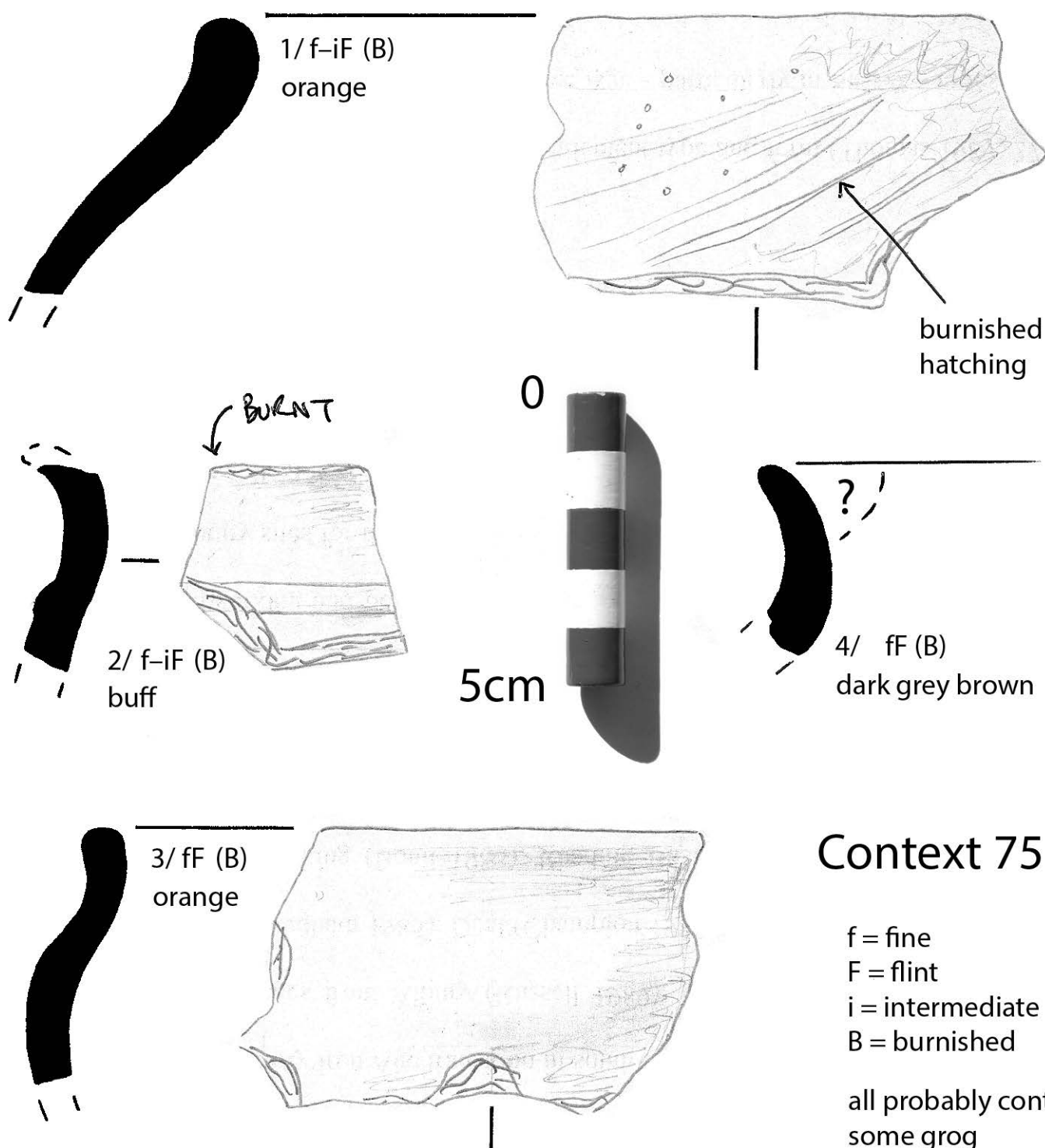


Figure 1: Late Iron Age pottery from Shopwyke



Shopwyke 1: Southern Atrebatian closed-mouth jar



Shopwyke 2: flint-tempered Aylesford-Swarling type cordoned jar



Shopwyke 3: 'Southern Atrebatic' S-shaped jar

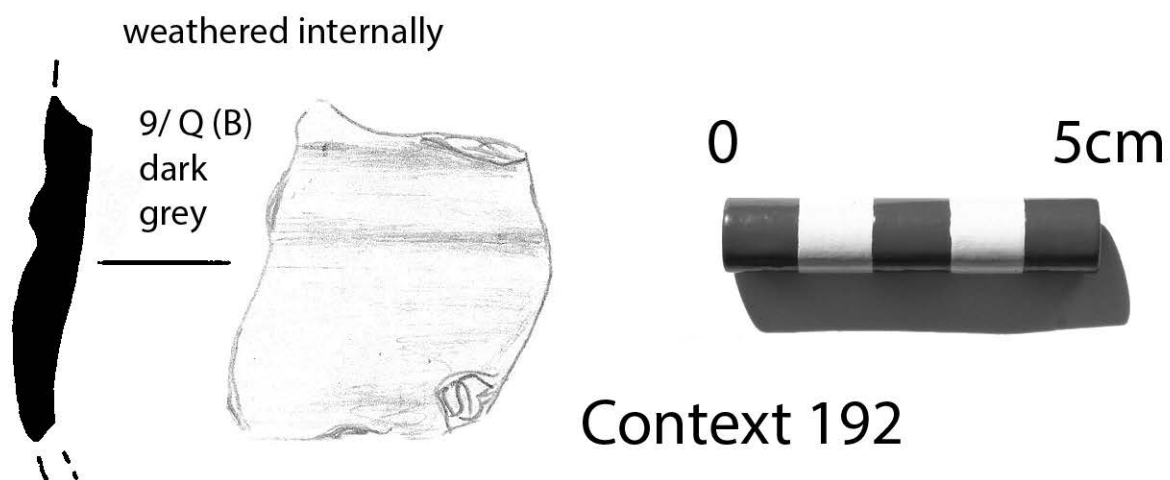
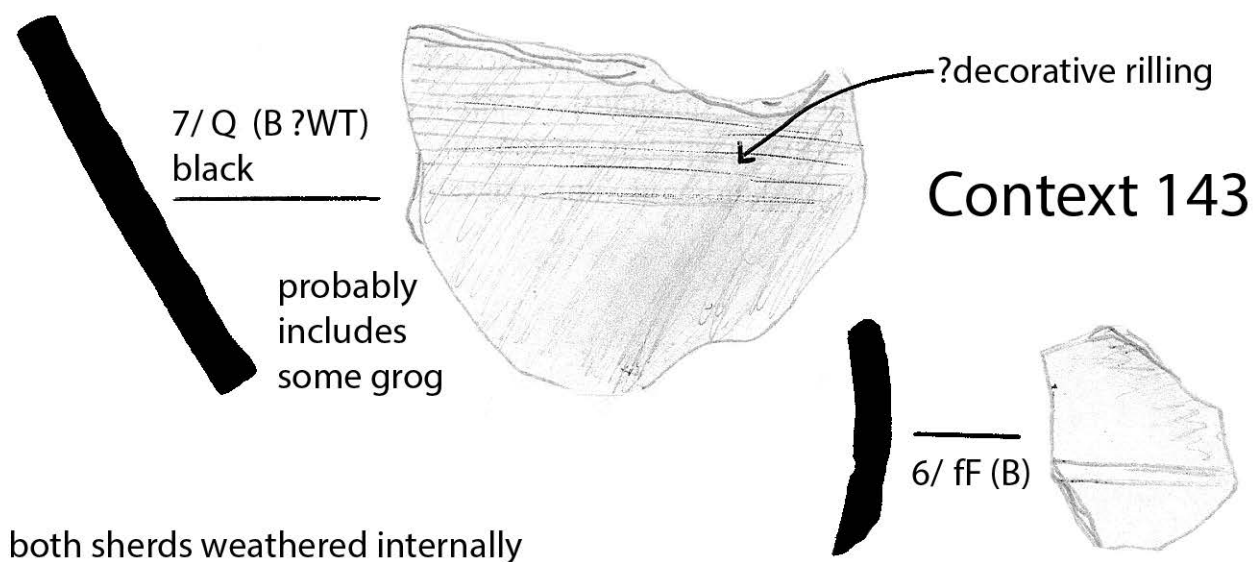
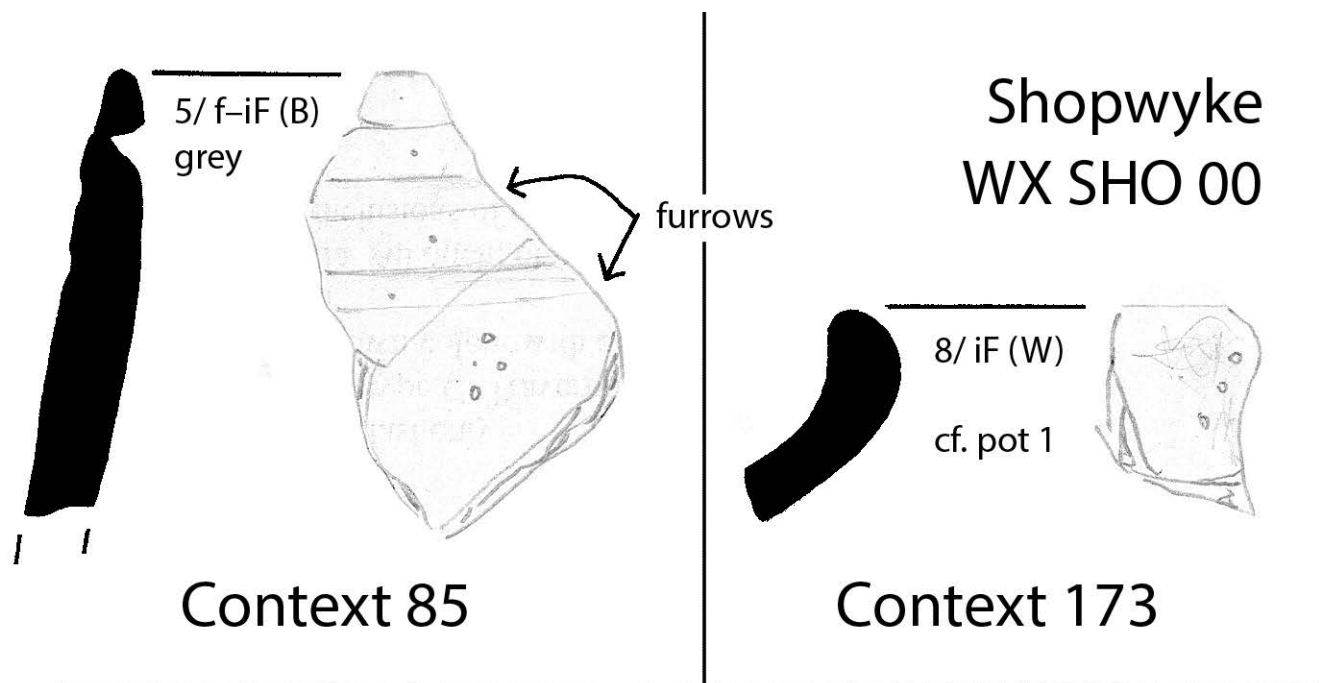


Figure 2: Middle (pot 5) and Late Iron Age pottery (pots 6–9) from Shopwyke

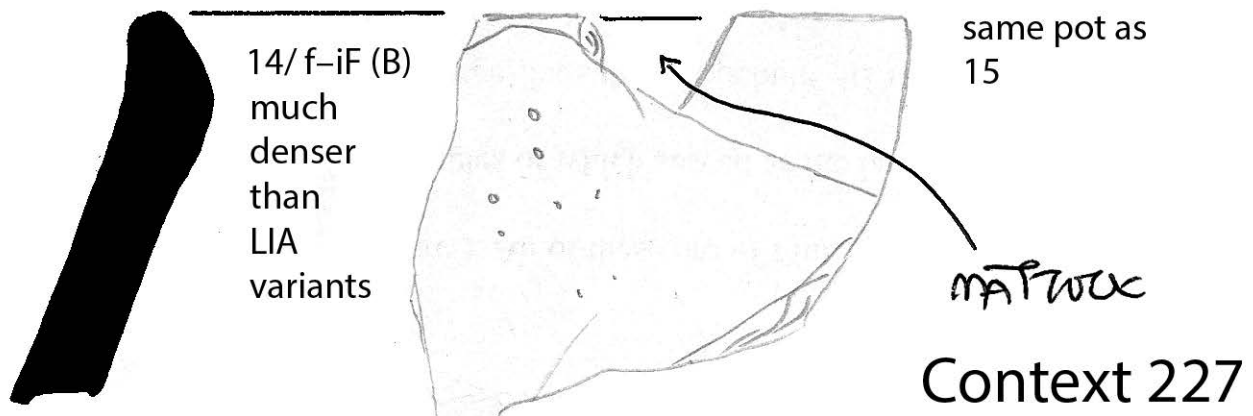
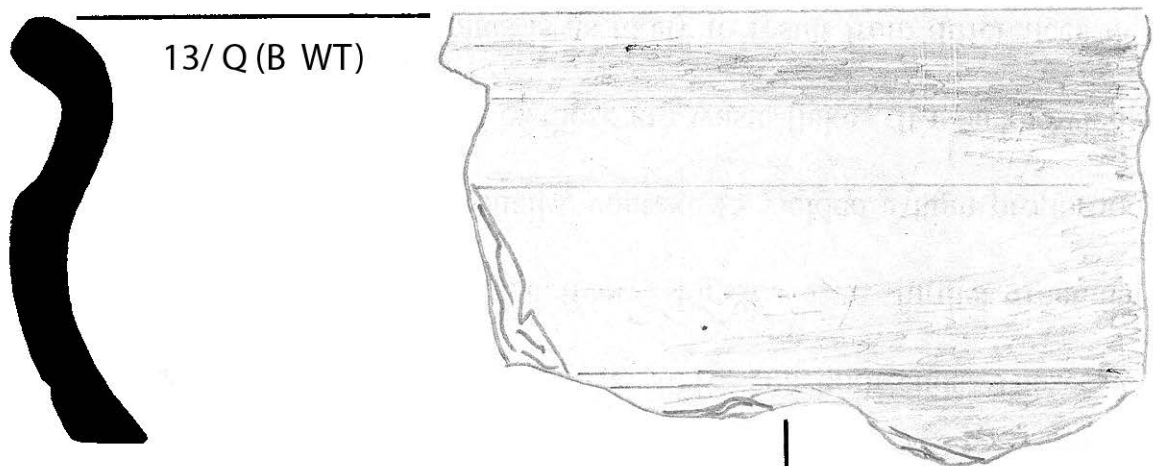
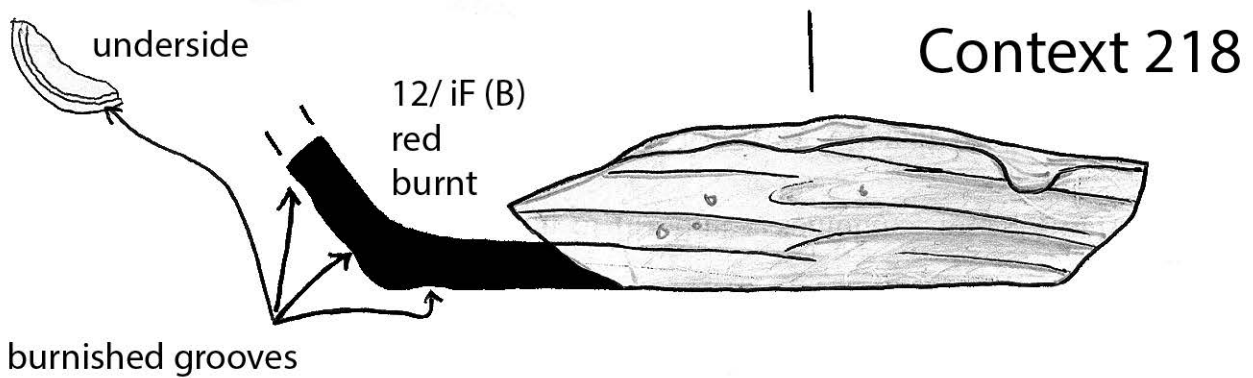
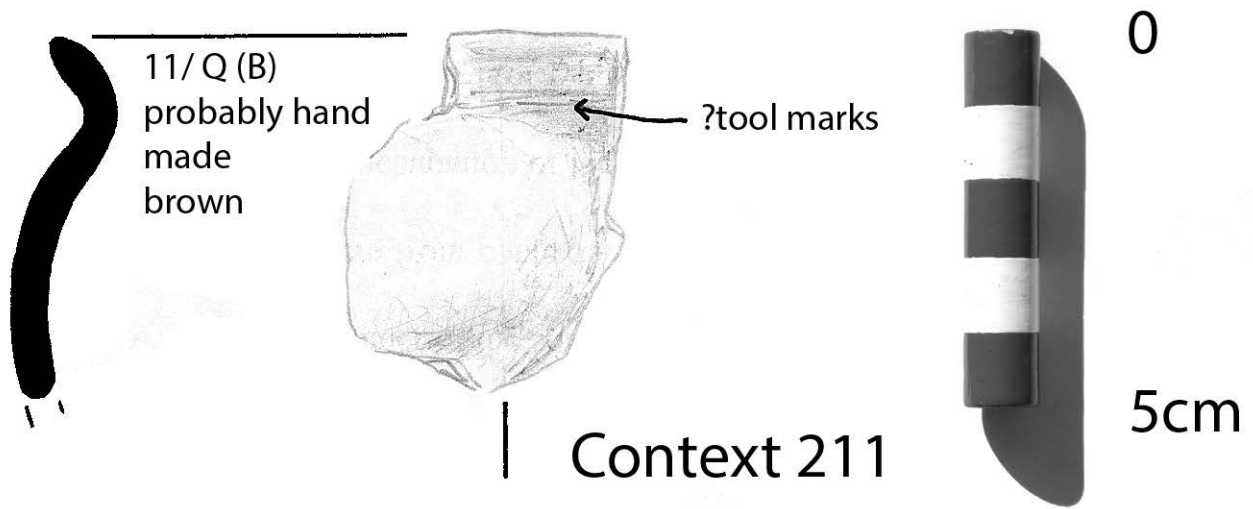


Figure 3. Middle (pots 12 and 13) and Late Iron Age pottery (possibly 11, and 13) from Shopwyke



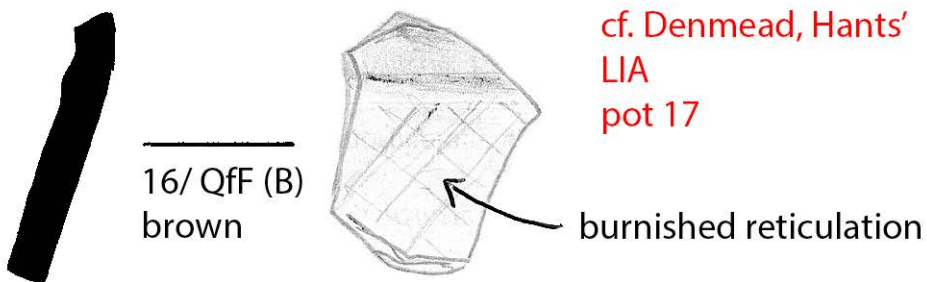
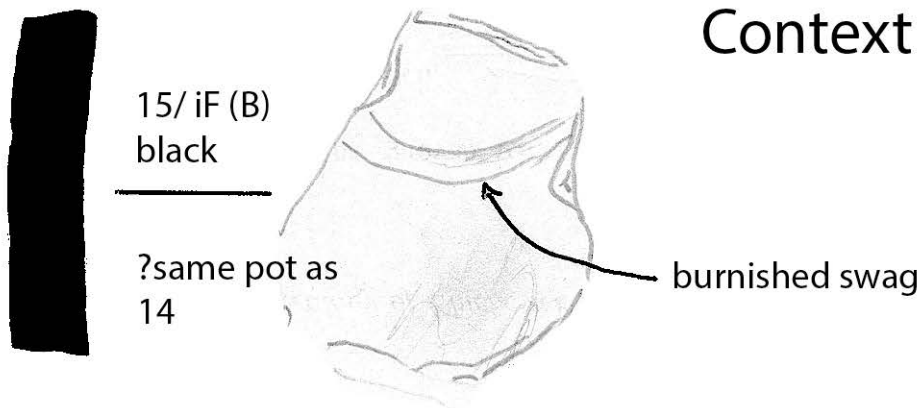
Shopwyke 12: base of decorated saucepan pot



Shopwyke 13: wheel thrown Aylesford-Swarling type jar

Shopwyke WX SHO 00

Context 229



Context 195

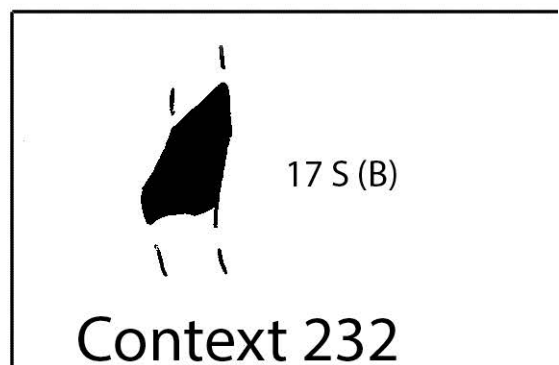
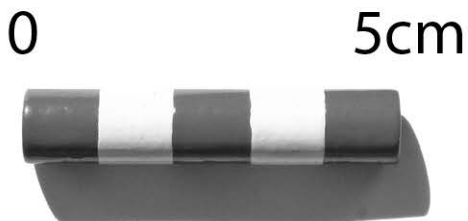
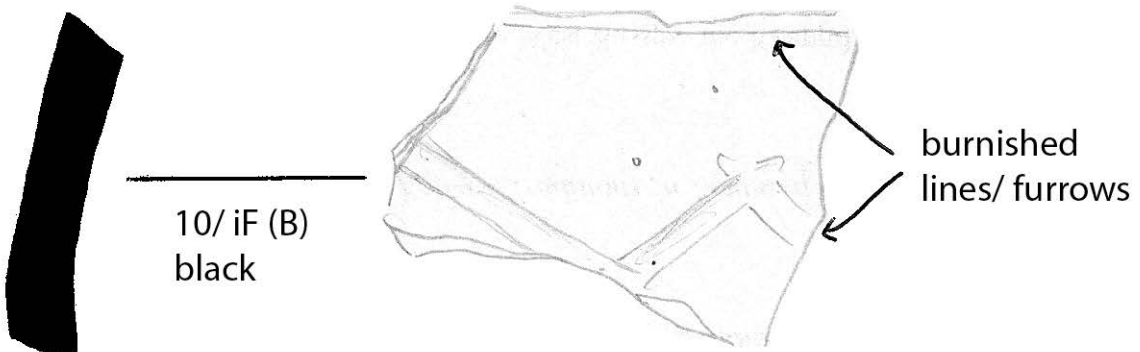


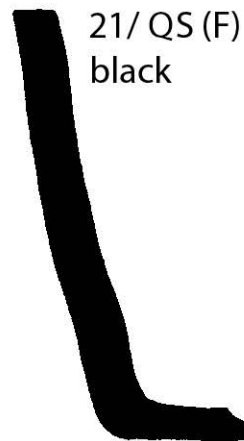
Figure 4: Middle or — possibly — Late Iron Age (pots 10 and 15) and Late Iron Age or Roman pottery (pots 16 and 17) from Shopwyke



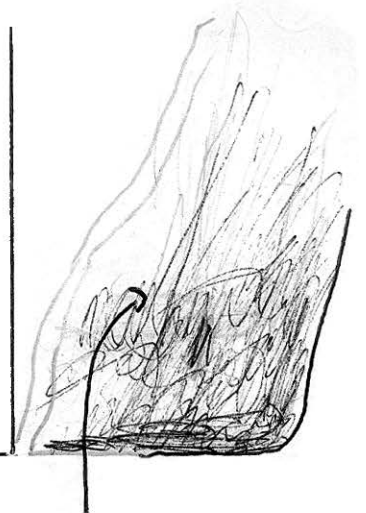
Shopwyke 10



18/ Q (B WT)
c. 10 cm diameter



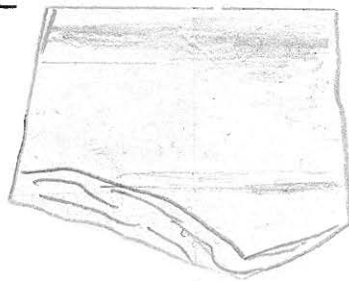
21/ QS (F)
black



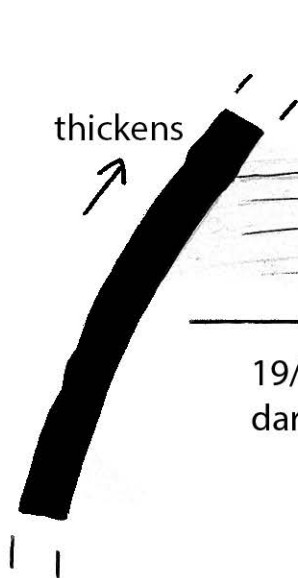
rough vertical faceting



20/ QfF (B WT)
dark grey

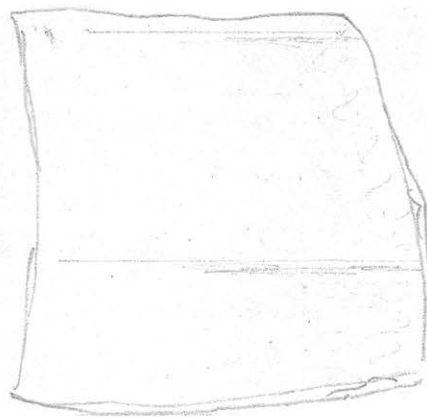


? SAME VESSEL



thickens

19/ QfF (B)
dark grey



Context 243

0



5cm

S = shelly
Q = quartz sand
B = burnished surface
WT = wheel thrown

Figure 5: Late Iron Age pottery from Shopwyke



Shopwyke 20: wheel thrown Aylesford-Swarling type cordoned jar

Figure 6: Middle and Late Iron Age pottery from Shopwyke
(assessment excavations)
(Site code 46981)



Shopwyke 24: large Southern Atrebatic closed-mouth jar (fabric f-iF)





Shopwyke 33: Aylesford-Swarling type jar (fabric GfF incorporating fine quartz sand)



Shopwyke 34: 'Southern Atrebat' or Roman S-shaped jar flint tempered jar (fabric f-iF)



Shopwyke 40: rim of saucepan pot (fabric f-iF)

